

# Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease Fact Sheet

## **What is hand, foot, and mouth disease (HFMD)?**

Hand, foot, and mouth disease is caused by viruses that belong to the Enterovirus genus (group). This group of viruses includes polioviruses, coxsackieviruses, echoviruses, and enteroviruses.

## **Who gets HFMD?**

HFMD is a common viral illness that usually affects infants and children younger than five years old; however, it can sometimes occur in adults.

## **How is HFMD spread?**

HFMD is spread from person to person by direct contact with the viruses that cause this disease. These viruses are found in the nose and throat secretions (such as saliva, sputum, or nasal mucus), fluid in blisters, and stool of infected persons. The viruses may be spread when infected persons touch objects and surfaces that are then touched by others.

## **What are the symptoms of HFMD?**

HFMD usually starts with a fever, poor appetite, a vague feeling of being unwell (malaise), and sore throat. One or two days after fever starts, painful sores usually develop in the mouth and a skin rash may appear. The rash is usually on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet; it may also appear on the knees, elbows, buttocks or genital area.

## **How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms usually appear three to six days after exposure.

## **How is HFMD diagnosed?**

Hand, foot and mouth disease is one of the many infections that cause mouth sores. Health care providers are able to determine whether the mouth sores are caused by hand, foot and mouth disease by considering the age of the patient, what symptoms are reported and by the appearance of the mouth sores. Additionally, depending on how severe the symptoms are, samples from the throat or stool may be collected and sent to a laboratory to test for the virus.

## **How long is a person able to spread the disease?**

Infected persons are most contagious during the first week of the illness. The viruses that cause HFMD can remain in the body for weeks after symptoms have gone away. This means that infected people can still pass the infection to others, even though they may appear well. Also, some people who are infected and shedding the virus, including most adults, may have no symptoms.

## **What is the treatment for HFMD?**

There is no specific treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease. Persons who are concerned about their symptoms should contact their healthcare provider.

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## What can be done to prevent the spread of HFMD?

A person can lower their risk of being infected by:

- Washing hands often with soap and water, especially after changing diapers and using the toilet.
- Disinfecting dirty surfaces and soiled items, including toys. First wash the items with soap and water, then disinfect them with a solution of chlorine bleach (made by mixing 1 tablespoon of bleach and 4 cups of water).
- Avoiding close contact such as kissing, hugging, or sharing eating utensils or cups with people who have HFMD.

## How can I get more information about HFMD?

- If you have concerns about HFMD, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/>.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/hand-foot-mouth/index.html>.

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